

Nada Stropnik¹ and Jože Sambt²

PARENTAL LEAVE AND CHILD ALLOWANCES: ATTITUDES, PREFERENCES AND POSSIBLE IMPACT

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1 INTRODUCTION

Family policy is aimed at neutralising, or at least lessening, the negative impact of psychological, social and economic constraints for forming families and having the desired/greater number of children. Financial and other family policy measures reconcile the objectives of strengthening families, offering equal opportunities to men and women, and increasing the well-being of individuals and families. It is believed that family policy measures also have an indirect impact on fertility. According to Laroque and Salanié (2004, p. 424), “it is natural for economists to presume the existence of a link between family transfers and fertility”. This is in line with the economic theory of fertility (Willis, 1971; Becker, 1981; Cigno, 1991), which associates the demand for children with the cost of children for their families. Any public transfer, be it in the form of cash benefit, price subsidy or lowering the opportunity cost of childbearing and childrearing, decreases the cost of children for their families and thus may positively influence fertility.

This paper addresses two family policy measures: parental leave and child allowance. The aim of the paper is to find out:

- 1) Which are the preferred alternative forms of these two measures (length and mode of use of the parental leave, and dependence of child allowance rates on the family income, age of child, and the number of children);
- 2) How much in favour of improved parental leave arrangements for working women and a substantially higher child allowance the respondents are, and what are the differences among European countries;
- 3) What possible impact the improvements in these two measures may have on deciding to have (more) children.

In the next Section, a short overview of previous research on the impact of family policy measures – parental leave and child allowance in particular – is given. A short description of parental leave and child allowance arrangements at the time of the national surveys follows in Section 3. In Section 4, data, model and methods are presented and explained. The results are presented in Section 5. Preferred family policy measure arrangements are compared with the current ones; attitudes towards the two selected measures are analysed; priority family policy measures to be introduced by the government are identified; and finally, possible impact of improved parental leave for employed women and higher child allowance (if introduced) on the fertility behaviour is evaluated. The conclusions are in Section 6.

¹ Institute for Economic Research, Kardeljeva ploščad 17, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia (stropnikn@ier.si).

² Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana, Kardeljeva ploščad 17, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia (joze.sambt@ef.uni-lj.si).

2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON THE IMPACT OF FAMILY POLICY MEASURES ON FERTILITY

As it is challenging and complex to formulate non-overt policy measures with possible fertility impact, it is also extremely complicated to measure the impact of such policies – and in particular the impact of an individual measure – on the fertility behaviour.³ One can never be sure about the size and direction of influence of other circumstances and about what the fertility rate would have been in the absence of such measures. It may be that policy interventions just strengthen a trend that was nevertheless under way Andersson (2004).

Nowhere the impact of new or improved family policy measures has been felt in the longer term (Neyer, 2003), not even in countries where abortion has been prohibited. Usually, the impact of family- and population policy measures was the greatest at their beginning, and it was gradually decreasing as benefits ceased to be new, or their value decreased (Klinger, 1987; Philipov, 1991). The problem is that positive short-term effects have been followed by a decline in births, indicating that these measures have mostly induced fluctuations in births (because of the change in timing) and not so much the births, which otherwise would not occur. But taking into account the possibility that postponed births might never have occurred, we can nevertheless speak about positive effects of measures introduced (Pavlik, 1991).

There is some evidence, however, of effective policy measures in France, Austria, Scandinavian countries, Hungary, the former German Democratic Republic, etc. Klinger (1987, p. 420) quotes Calot, who has estimated that in the absence of pronatalist policies, the completed fertility rate in France in the second half of this century would have been reduced by 0.2-0.3 children per woman. Of course, not all the increase in the fertility rate can be attributed to the family policy, but it is true that the fertility rate remained at a satisfactory level until the middle of the 1970s. According to Blanchet and Ekert-Jaffé (1994), the same increase in the number of children per woman would occur in Britain if the present French family benefits were introduced there.

The role of parental leave/allowances and child allowances as fertility incentives has not yet been consistently proven by research. There seems to be some effect on childbearing behaviour, but the measurable effects are small and not always significant (Neyer, 2003, Appendix, p. 3). Büttner and Lutz (1990) argue that a remarkable increase in the period fertility level in the former German Democratic Republic may be directly related to the explicitly pronatalist maternity policy package introduced in 1976. Also, the relative stability of order-specific mean ages at maternity indicates that the impact was not in the form of short-term anticipations of births that would be compensated by lower rates of childbearing in future. The total fertility rate was increasing in a six-year period following the implementation of measures, and despite a later decrease remained at the level of 1.7 until 1988, when the transition process began. However, this study was based on a descriptive and intuitive approach where other fertility determinants were not checked for, which limits the reliability of the results (Gauthier and Hatzius, 1997).

In the end of the period 1984-1990, which in Sweden was characterised by a continuously increasing fertility up to the level of 2.13, Hoem (1990) believed that it was a reward for the expansion in public day-care, child allowances, parental leave provisions, parents' rights to part-

³ An overview of research on the relationship between family policy and fertility is given in Neyer (2003), Laroque and Salanié (2004) and Gauthier (2005).

time work and similar measures. At that time, Sweden was an example country among the developed countries due to its facilitating women's entry into the labour market and their continued attachment to it at minimum cost to childbearing and childrearing. However, Rønsen (1997 and 2004a) states that Swedish studies based on individual data did not render much support for the notion that family policies have stimulated fertility. She quotes studies, which have examined the effects of the extension of parental leave and supply of public day-care and have found no significant effects on the births in Sweden and Norway. Her own analysis for Sweden, Norway and Finland indicates that maternity/parental leave extensions may have some positive effect on fertility, child allowances none, while the effect of public childcare coverage was estimated to be negative and significant (Rønsen, 1999).⁴ In her recent study (Rønsen, 2004a), a positive significant impact of the length of maternity/parental leave was found for third conception in Finland and for second one in Norway. The effect is more significant for Finland that had more extensions during the analysis period.

According to Hoem (2000), childbearing among childless women in Sweden was affected by both public policies and economic fluctuations. Changes in Swedish social policies induced a shorter spacing of births, which caused second and third births to occur at a quickened pace (but it did not affect first births). Also Andersson (2004) demonstrated the change in birth-spacing practice that occurred in Sweden following the introduction and extension of a »speed premium« (in the 1980s) on childbearing in the parental leave arrangement. Higher second-birth risks only applied to childbearing before the first child turned 3, and it is where childbearing propensities peaked in 1995. Oláh (1997) has found out that Swedish women on parental leave have speeded up their second birth while other categories of women have not. The author's analysis has identified an increase in second-birth risk in periods of advantageous policies and stimulating reforms in Sweden and Hungary. A positive impact of Swedish policy measures facilitating the combination of paid leave and family responsibilities was shown also in Andersson (2000) and Corman (2000).

In early 1990, the change in the Austrian parental-leave policy, which favoured women who had their second or subsequent child shortly after the previous one, increased the tempo of childbearing (Hoem et al., 2001). The consequent unexpected large rise in public expenditure caused a cut in child allowances in the mid 1990s. According to the authors, this is likely to have contributed to the further reduction in Austrian fertility in subsequent years.

Olay's and Fractal's (2004) results for Hungary indicate that women's employment does not necessarily reduce the propensity to become a mother if the combination of labour-force participation and family life has been facilitated by policy measures. In Poland, however, where state support was somewhat less generous, part-time workers and housewives had substantially higher first-birth intensity than full-time employed women. Even so, indication was found that as policy measures increasingly improved the conditions to combine employment and family responsibilities, the propensity to have the first child increased.

Gauthier and Hatzius (1997) found only a limited effect on fertility of the governmental support to families: as high as a 25% increase in average benefits (child allowance and maternity/parental paid leave) in 22 industrialised countries would result in a short-run increase of 0.01 children per woman and a long-run increase of 0.07 children per woman.

⁴ The last finding is somewhat puzzling, but may be explained by the fact that more public childcare facilities are needed when the activity rate of women is higher, and higher female labour force attachment used to be negatively related to fertility in the Nordic countries. Today, there is no longer a negative relationship between fertility and female employment in these countries.

Child allowances are positively and significantly related to fertility – in particular to the birth of the first child - while the impact of the duration of maternity/parental leave and the wage replacement rate proved to be insignificant. No evidence was found that child allowance affects fertility in the Anglo-Saxon countries, but the effect was large and consistent in the Scandinavian countries, with continental and southern European countries in between. Rønsen (2004a) examined the influence of child allowance in Norway, and she found out that it was not significant and had no impact on the risk of conception.

The impact of introduction of desirable family policy measures on fertility behaviour was estimated for the Czech Republic by Kocourková (2001) using the Family and Fertility Survey data. She concluded that the chances for fundamental change in fertility intentions significantly increase only in case of introduction of a special allowance for parents taking care of children instead of working outside the home, or measures facilitating a greater compatibility of professional and parental duties (p. 47). Kamarás et al. (1998) based their study of the impact of policies on family size preferences and stimulating unplanned births on the Population Policy Attitudes and Acceptance Surveys conducted in the early 1990s. Measures providing financial support proved to have the highest fertility impact in most countries included in the survey, followed by measures aiming at better working arrangements. In her recent study, Engelhardt (2004) used the same kind of data, namely the 2001 Austrian Population Policy Acceptance Study data (they make part of the IPPAS database, at which this paper is based), to examine the causal effects of family policy incentives and constraints on fertility intentions and preferences. Her results show that a considerable increase in child allowances could contribute to increase fertility aspirations at all parities but parity 1. On the other hand, improved parental leave has significant impact only at parity 1. The most astonishing result is that Austrian women do not show the expected response on financial constraints, meaning that the Austrian government cannot reach its goal of increased fertility through current generous financial incentives.

Laroque and Salanié (2004) studied a possible link between more generous child care benefits (formerly available to parents with three and more children and then extended to parents with two children) and the increase in births in France since 1995. The authors found out that fertility responded to this financial incentive in a non-negligible way, and that it may account for one half to three-quarters of the recent rise in the French birth rate. However, it was not in line with the finding that economic variables contributed little to explaining the fertility. Also, impact was identified for first birth in particular, and was zero for births of rank 3 and more, which was in contradiction with the measure whose impact was analysed.

Fagnani (2002) opposes the general understanding that without appropriate support from the society, women are obliged to choose between maternity and employment (at least on a full-time basis). She argues that such approach is “too determinative and overestimates the role of state policies per se”, and points to the influence of “a complex set of interactions between cultural norms with respect to child care outside home, attitudes towards working mothers and family policies” (p. 105). According to Rønsen (2004b), generous family policies may be necessary, but not sufficient, to sustain fertility at a reasonable level. Falling fertility rates in Sweden in the mid-1990s indicate that adverse macroeconomic conditions and rising unemployment have counteracting effects.

Kamarás et al. (1998, p. 244) stress that policy experiences in different countries often reflect different historical, cultural and religious tradition; therefore measures successfully implemented in one country need not have the same result in other countries. Also Gauthier

(2005) points to the fact that the link between policies and fertility is a complex one and that one should take account of female employment, economic context and social norms regarding gender equality, too. Other social processes - such as various changes in the status of women, postponement or refusal of marriage, liberalisation of laws in view of contraception, abortion and divorce, etc. - have a decisive effect on fertility, too. A negative impact on fertility might originate from economic recession, falling standard of living, unemployment, social and political changes, etc., all experienced by former communist countries during the transition years (Stropnik, 1996). The effect of economic variables on fertility is hard to isolate from the effect of demographic variables (Laroque and Salanié (2004).

Based on the past experiences and research findings, our assumption is that family policy measures very seldom have important and measurable demographic effects, and if, then it is for very short periods only. Our hypothesis is that people rather easily declare that there might be or would be a positive impact of the implementation of new or changed family policy measures on their decision making regarding having a child or having more children, but when it comes to making a decision, the impact of other circumstances often prevails. One of the reasons for this discrepancy is the fact that survey questionnaires can not take into account all factors that influence one's decision to have a child and the modalities of these factors. Also, since there are no consequences of giving this or that answer, respondents tend to give answers, which they think are expected.

3 CURRENT FAMILY POLICY MEASURE ARRANGEMENTS

Information on family policy arrangements at the time of national surveys (here forth: current family policy arrangements) is essential for the interpretation and understanding of the respondents' preferences. In line with the scope of the paper, only parental leave and child allowance are described below.

3.1 Parental Leave

The term “parental leave” includes all forms of leave of absence from employment that are a continuation of the maternity leave. Its main purpose is to provide opportunity to employed parents to take care of their children in the first months (and years), with job security and (possibly) wage compensation or a lump sum that lowers the opportunity costs of their temporary absence from work. Parental leave is one of the crucial instruments for successful reconciliation of work and family life. In some countries, all residents are entitled to parental leave and allowance. The latter is financed from the state budget and is aimed at creating more favourable economic conditions for families raising children at home, also because such families do not profit from subsidized childcare arrangements.

Parental leave arrangements at the time of national surveys are presented in Table 1. Only paid leave is taken into account since unpaid leave is not affordable for most families. In half of the observed countries there is a possibility of part-time parental leave; only in the Netherlands it is the only way of using parental leave. In three countries, the leave may be used until the child's age of eight.

Table 1: Parental leave at the time of the national surveys (paid leave; including maternity leave after birth of the child and additional paternity leave, with job security, if taken in one piece)

Country	Parental leave at the time of the survey		
	Duration ¹⁾	Possibility of part-time leave	Flexibility
Austria	up to age 2	up to age 4	
Belgium (Flanders)	up to age 0.5	up to age 0.8; or 1/5 reduction of working time up to age 1.5	
Czech Republic	up to age 3		
Cyprus	up to age 0.3		
Estonia	up to age 3		
Finland	up to age 3	up to school age ²⁾	
Germany	up to age 2 ³⁾	yes	upon approval by the employer the 3 rd year of parental leave can be postponed until the child is 8 years of age
Hungary	up to age 3	from age 1.5 to age 3	
Italy	up to age 1.2		may be used until the child is 8 years old
Lithuania	up to age 1		the leave may be used in parts, also, the persons entitled to the leave may use it alternately
The Netherlands ⁴⁾		up to age 0.7	may be taken until the child is 8 years of age
Poland	up to age 2.5		
Romania	up to age 2		
Slovenia	up to age 1	up to age 1.7	

Notes:

1) Paternity leave is added if applicable. Special arrangements for certain groups are not taken into consideration.

2) Till the end of the year in which the child starts attending school.

3) In five out of sixteen federal countries paid till age 2.5-3.

4) 12 weeks of full-time leave + 26 weeks of exclusively part-time leave.

Sources: DIALOG project, WP4 country reports (internal material); European Commission (2001).

3.2 Child Allowance

Child allowance (child benefit, family allowance) is a public transfer paid for children and aimed at alleviating a sharp decrease in the family living standard following the birth of a child (since the same or lower income is distributed among more persons). In most countries, child allowances were paid irrespective of economic position of the family, meaning that the stress is on horizontal redistribution (that is, on equity among families with similar income but different needs arising from the number of family members). In

four out of fourteen observed countries, however, child allowances are income tested, which means a vertical redistribution of income. Allowances may also differ according to the age of child, but in the observed countries their amount is mostly independent of age. Child allowance may have a demographic objective, too; this is evident from higher allowances for children of higher birth orders, although the marginal costs of children are usually lower for each subsequent child. Child allowance arrangements at the time of national surveys are presented in Table 2.

4 DATA, MODELS AND METHODS

4.1 Data

The analysis is based on the International Population Policy Acceptance Study (IPPAS) database that covers 14 European countries and includes 35,377 respondents.⁵ These countries are: Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Slovenia. National surveys were conducted between 2000 and 2003. There was a section on family policy measures in the questionnaire. People's attitudes and preferences towards family policy measures were captured. Improved parental leave for working women who are having a baby⁶ and a substantial rise⁷ in child allowance, that are in focus of our analysis, were two of thirteen listed family policy measures.⁸ Other measures included: lower income tax for people with dependent children, income dependent allowances for families with children, better day-care facilities for pre-school and school children, birth allowance, childcare allowance for non-employed parent, flexible working hours and opportunities for part-time employment, a substantial decrease in the costs of education, and better housing for families with children.

Considering the fact that the final topic to be investigated was a possible impact of family policy measures on fertility behaviour, a sub-sample of respondents aged 20-49 years was formed comprising 23,307 persons. The lower limit is imposed by the lowest age of respondents in one of the countries, while the upper limit is close to the biological one for women to consider further pregnancies.

Since not all questions were included in all national questionnaires, the number of countries and observations varies across analyses performed. Due to considerable within-country variation, East and West Germany were treated as two separate units.

⁵ It is important to note that we used the May 2005 version of the IPPAS database, which is subject to change before it becomes available to the research community in 2006. Due to that, the presented results are only temporary and may be considerably different if important mistakes are discovered by the DIALOG Consortium before the end of the project.

⁶ This measure was not included into the Italian questionnaire. In Belgium and Germany the question was limited to maternity leave. In Lithuania, the question specified duration of parental leave till the child's age of one. In Finland, the question was about raising parental allowance from 65% to 80% of the former wage.

⁷ »Substantial« was quantified as 7% of the monthly GDP. The amount of an increase was not specified in Estonia and Lithuania.

⁸ The measures and their number were different in some countries.

Table 2: Child allowance arrangements at the time of national surveys

Country	Dependent on income	Independent of family income	Higher for older children	Independent of age of children	According to the age of children	According to the number of children
Austria		X	X		The same for each child	Increases with the number of children X
Belgium (Flanders)		X (but only for those covered by social insurance)	X			X
Czech Republic	Income ceiling: 3 times the living minimum		X		X	
Cyprus		X		X		For all children in families with 4 and more children
Estonia		X		X		For the 2 nd and further children twice the amount for the 1 st child
Finland		X		X		X
Germany		X		X		The same for the first 3 children
Hungary		X		X		X
Italy	Only for insured; income ceiling in absolute amount			X		X
Lithuania		X		Yes, but entitlement only till age 3	X	
The Netherlands		X	X		X	
Poland	Income ceiling: 50% average wage per family member			X		X
Romania		X		X	X	
Slovenia	Income ceiling: average wage per family member			X		X

Note: Different arrangement for specific groups are not taken into account

Sources: DIALOG project, WP4 country reports (internal material); European Commission (2001).

4.2 Theoretical model

Based on the overview of the IPPAS data concerning fertility intentions, particularly those on the fertility impact of the introduction of the desirable family policy measures, we have decided not to quantify possible fertility impact – which was done by Kocourková (2001).⁹ Our intention was to identify those characteristics of the respondents who selected these two policy measures as desirable, which determine their lower or higher propensity for probably deciding to have a(nother) child if the desirable family policy measures were introduced, as compared to the characteristics of the reference group. Our theoretical model builds on previous research on the topic, which used the Family and Fertility Survey and the Population Policy Attitudes and Acceptance Survey data (Kocourková, 2001; Gauthier, 1998; Kamarás et al., 1998).

Due to high importance of all family policy measures that were selected as most desirable, it is hard to predict the fertility impact of improved parental leave and a considerable rise in child allowance as compared to that of the implementation of all other combinations of desirable measures. Relative frequencies of these two measures among all desirable measures are not of much help since we do not know to what extent the respondents who selected these two measures would be stimulated to probably decide to have a(nother) child.¹⁰ Too many different factors influence fertility decision-making.

Our model uses demographic, economic and some other explanatory variables. Standard demographic variables (covariates) related to life cycle include sex, age, and attained educational level of the respondents. Six five-year age groups are observed and three educational levels (primary and lower secondary; higher secondary; and post-secondary). Two demographic variables are related to family responsibilities: number of children (0, 1, 2, and 3 and over) and living arrangement (living with spouse/partner, living apart together, and no partner). A general intention to have a(nother) child in the future is included, too. Economic characteristics of respondents are brought into the model through variable “employment status” (full time, part time, casual work, and no job). There is also a country dummy in the model, and a dummy variable for respondents who selected improved parental leave and substantial rise in child allowances among three/two most desirable measures. We refer to this model as Model 1. In Model 2, the latter dummy variable does not appear since an additional condition was added, and namely that desirable measures included both improved parental leave and a substantial rise in child allowance.

While we expect the likelihood of deciding to have a(nother) child to decrease with age of the respondent, we hesitate to predict the sign of the coefficient for the sex, attained education and employment status covariates. It is expected that the selected two measures may be more important for respondents up to age 40 than for older ones because most births are realized till that age and the relative importance of child allowance is higher for families with lower income (and people usually have lower income in their young age).

⁹ Using the 1997 Czech Family and Fertility Survey data, Kocourková (2001) modelled the effect of the implementation of a hypothetical measure separately for two groups of respondents depending on their previously declared intention to have another child. The probability that an unplanned child would be born to those who had declared not to intend to have another child was constructed based on the agreement with the statements »I would reconsider the possibility of having a(nother) child« and »I would probably decide to have a(nother) child«. The probability that a planned child would be born to those who had declared an intention to have another child was constructed based on the agreement with the latter statement quoted above.

¹⁰ The frequency of a significant rise in child allowance is twice the average one for all listed family policy measures while that of improved parental leave is somewhat below the average.

A negative association between the number of children the respondent already has and the likelihood to decide to have a(nother) child after implementation of the desirable family policy measures is expected. On the other hand, we assume that respondents living with partners will be more inclined to having a(nother) child than respondents without a partner or living apart together. We also assume that fertility response highly depends on the general intention to have a(nother) child in the future.

The availability of data was a decisive constraint for our theoretical model; ideally, additional variables would have been included. Some possibly relevant explanatory variables had to be omitted because they were not available for many countries (“satisfaction with the total household income”) and/or there were too many missing cases (“the age of the youngest child”). Including such variables would have meant losing too many observations.

4.3 Method

Respondents were asked to select three measures (two in Austria and Belgium-Flanders) which they would most like to see implemented by the government.¹¹ They further evaluated the consequences for their personal life if the measures they considered desirable were introduced. Four answers were offered with which the respondents agreed or disagreed:

- a. It would make it easier for me to have the number of children I intend to have
- b. It would enable me to have my next child sooner
- c. I would reconsider the possibility of having a(nother) child
- d. I would probably decide to have a(nother) child.

Our analysis is limited to those respondents who agreed with the most serious statement as regards their future fertility behaviour: the one that probably means more births. Other positive statements are much less binding. In Model 2, our focus group is further reduced due to the condition that the respondent selected both improved parental leave arrangements and a substantial rise in child allowance among the family policy measures that he/she considered desirable.

One of the methods to estimate the correlation between our dependent variables and explanatory variables is logistic regression. We applied the binary logistic regression method to the model described above in order to estimate:

1. The probable fertility impact of the two selected measures (in some cases accompanied by one more that varied across answers) as compared to all other combinations of measures, if implemented by the governments, and
2. The characteristics that determine the lower or higher propensity of the respondents who selected the two measures of our interest for probably deciding to have a(nother) child if the desirable family policy measures were introduced.

The dependent variable is the respondents’ answer to the question if - in the case of the government’s introduction of three (or two) family policy measures they considered most desirable - they would probably decide to have a(nother) child. In all countries except

¹¹ Also in some other countries the respondents did not always select three measures. For instance, In Estonia and both parts of Germany only 53%-62% of all respondents did so. This was very unfortunate for our analysis because it decreased the possibility to have the two measures which we focus on selected.

Cyprus¹² the answer to this question was dichotomous (“yes” or “no”) which enabled us to use binary logistic regression. All variables were entered at the same time using the ‘Enter’ method. The results are presented in terms of odds (ratio between the likelihood that particular outcome will occur and the likelihood that it will not). Since all independent variables are categorical, the results can only be interpreted within categories. Values smaller than 1.00 indicate that the likelihood of occurrence is smaller for this particular category than for the reference category (everything else being controlled for).

5 RESULTS

5.1 Preferred arrangements¹³

5.1.1 Parental leave

Only in four countries the respondents were asked about their most preferred type of parental leave. Current regulation was specified in the question, so we can assume that all respondents were properly informed about the duration of parental leave when evaluating it. Unfortunately for comparative analysis, also the alternative answers were adapted to current regulation and prevailing patterns of combining work with care for small children.

In Table 3, only preferences by the respondents aged 20-49 who were in favour of parental leave are presented. In three countries, the existent parental leave arrangements are also most preferred: half-time leave and flexible leave in the Netherlands, and full-time leave in Poland and Slovenia. A quarter of the Polish respondents would prefer flexible leave that is not available in this country. The preferences of the Slovenian respondents reflect poor availability of part-time and flexible jobs, but may also be under strong influence of the facts that: 1) full wage compensation is paid throughout the one-year long maternity and parental leave, and 2) good quality child care is widely available and highly subsidized. In Romania, only full-time leave is possible but also least preferred.

Table 3: Most preferred type of parental leave; respondents aged 20-49 who were in favour of parental leave; %

Country	Most preferred type of parental leave			
	Full-time leave	Half-time leave	Flexible leave	Total
Netherlands	17.0	49.6	33.4	100.0
Poland	57.0	18.5	24.4	100.0
Romania	5.1	24.0	71.0	100.0
Slovenia	81.6	11.6	6.8	100.0

Source: IPPAS database, May 2005 version; own calculations.

¹² In the Cypriot questionnaire there was also the answer »no opinion«. We excluded these cases from our analysis.

¹³ Determinants of public opinion towards parental leave and child allowances, as captured by the first round of the Attitudes and Acceptance Surveys, were studied by Gauthier (1998).

5.1.2 Child allowance

Child allowance is dependent on family income in the Czech Republic, Italy and Slovenia, and in all three countries the highest share of respondents chose such arrangement. The same was preferred by highest shares of respondents in Cyprus, Finland and Germany where they have child allowance independent of income. In Hungary, these two arrangements enjoyed the same support. Respondents in Belgium (Flanders), Estonia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Romania were mostly happy with an existent arrangement, which is child allowance independent of income.

Surprisingly, the majority of respondents in all countries prefer the arrangement of child allowance according to the age of children, which they already have. Respondents from countries with the same child allowances for all children regardless of birth order highly prefer this option. This is also true for the majority of respondents from other countries except Hungary, where the existent child allowances that are increasing with the number of children are preferred.

5.2 Attitudes and highest preferences

The proportions of respondents who were strongly in favour or in favour of individual family policy measures (13 altogether) were generally over 60%. The exception was support to some measures in the Netherlands, Finland and Estonia. In Romania, Slovenia and Italy, the support was over 80% to all listed family policy measures. The highest support was registered in Romania to lower income tax for people with dependent children (98.2%).

As can be seen in Table 4, very high proportions of the respondents were also (strongly) in favour of improved parental leave arrangements for working women and a substantial rise in child allowance. The lowest support to improved (maternity) leave was found in Belgium (Flanders), which is very much surprising considering the fact that both maternity and parental leave in this country are the shortest among the European countries included in the analysis. Maternity allowance is also far from full wage compensation, except for civil servants. The Netherlands is also an interesting case with 28.9% of respondents not in favour of improved parental leave arrangements although the leave is rather short (up to age 0.7) and can be taken only if accompanied by part-time employment. The highest support to improved parental leave was registered in Romania (duration up to age 2 with 85% wage compensation), Slovenia (duration up to age 1 with 100% wage compensation) and Lithuania (duration up to age 1, 60% wage compensation). Obviously, the measure was not enough defined, so it is very probable that the respondents had different characteristics of parental leave in mind when expressing their support to the improvement of parental leave arrangements. Some respondents (or respondents in some countries) may have perceived it primarily as a reconciliation measure with the stress on its duration, while others may have understood improvement as a higher amount of parental allowance.

Table 4: Attitudes towards implementation of two family policy measures; % of all answers, by countries

Country	Family policy measure to be implemented by the government					
	Improved parental leave arrangements for working women			A substantial rise in child allowance		
	(Strongly) in favour	Neither in favour nor against	(Strongly) against	(Strongly) in favour	Neither in favour nor against	(Strongly) against
Austria	86.8	9.7	3.4	70.7	19.7	9.5
Belgium (Flanders)	62.4	28.9	8.7	69.5	21.3	9.3
Czech Republic	86.9	11.8	1.3	85.5	11.0	3.5
Cyprus	93.6	5.7	0.7	86.7	10.7	2.7
Estonia	90.8	7.5	1.7	94.5	4.2	1.3
Finland	76.4	21.1	2.5	67.7	24.7	7.6
East-Germany	85.0	13.7	1.3	85.5	10.0	4.6
West-Germany	83.0	13.6	3.4	75.6	14.0	10.3
Hungary	87.7	9.0	3.3	92.4	5.6	2.0
Italy	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	89.3	n.a.	10.7
Lithuania	94.8	4.7	0.5	79.8	15.0	5.2
Netherlands	71.1	16.3	12.6	59.9	23.8	16.3
Poland	91.1	8.4	0.5	68.4	17.8	13.8
Romania	97.8	n.a.	2.2	96.8	n.a.	3.2
Slovenia	97.5	n.a.	2.5	94.3	n.a.	5.7

Notes:

1. Rows may not sum to 100 due to rounding.
2. In Austria, Belgium and Germany the question was limited to maternity leave.

Source: IPPAS database, May 2005 version; own calculations.

The highest proportion of the respondents who were (strongly) in favour of a substantial rise in child allowance was identified in Romania, Estonia and Slovenia. The level of child allowance has decreased dramatically in Romania during the transition years. In Slovenia, child allowance is income dependent and is very low for children in middle-income families while it is quite high for children in low-income families, particularly those of higher birth orders.

The respondents were asked to select three family policy measures (two in Austria and Belgium-Flanders), which they would most like to see implemented by the government. Percentages of the respondents who selected improved parental leave among their most desirable family policy measures as well as country ranks according to these percentages are presented in Table 5; the same information is available for a substantial rise in child allowance. The first three choices were taken into account on an equal basis, i.e. without applying weights. Higher ranks indicate that the respondents in these countries perceived the proposed measure as very important. Lower ranks, however, do not necessarily mean that a certain measure is not very important; they may reflect satisfactory arrangements in those countries.

We can see that the percentages of respondents who very much desire an improvement in the parental leave arrangements for working women vary considerably among countries: from 11.9% in East Germany to 42.2% in Slovenia. Germany, Hungary and Finland have very family-friendly arrangements in terms of the duration of the leave. The wage compensation rate is also relatively high in Hungary (70%) till the child's age of two; in Germany and Finland it is income dependent, but in Germany, income limits for entitlement were increased substantially in 2001. In Slovenia, improvement could only mean a prolongation of a one-year

Table 5: Percentages of respondents who selected improved parental leave arrangements and a substantial rise in child allowance as most desirable measures (% of respondents, and country ranks)

	Improved parental leave arrangements for working women		A substantial rise in child allowance	
	% of respondents	Country rank	% of respondents	Country rank
Slovenia	42.2	1	31.4	11
Estonia	41.7	2	63.6	2
Romania	35.6	3	45.6	5
Cyprus	28.9	4	11.3	15
Czech Republic	22.7	5	38.3	6
Austria	21.4	6	11.8	14
Netherlands	21.2	7	37.5	7
Poland	21.1	8	25.4	12
Lithuania	20.7	9	34.4	10
Belgium (Flanders)	16.8	10	18.5	13
Finland	15.8	11	36.6	8
Hungary	12.8	12	53.2	3
West-Germany	12.7	13	36.2	9
East-Germany	11.9	14	46.5	4
Italy	n.a.	n.a.	68.9	1

Source: IPPAS database, May 2005 version; own calculations.

parental leave (due to full wage compensation), while in Estonia it would most probably mean an increase in parental allowance during a three-year long parental leave.

A substantial rise in child allowance is most desired in Italy. Almost 69% of Italian respondents selected it, which is by just one percentage point less than the share of respondent who opted for income dependent child allowance. This means that a high proportion of Italian respondents desire a substantially higher but still income dependent child allowance. In Estonia and Hungary, too, more than half of the respondents desired a substantial rise in child allowance to be implemented by their governments. Child allowances in both countries are independent of income and age but increasing with the number of children. The respondents obviously consider them too low compared to the costs of children.

5.3 Possible fertility impact

Taking account of all combinations of desirable family policy measures to be introduced by governments, from 27.7% of the respondents in Austria to 82.0% in Estonia¹⁴ declared that they would reconsider the possibility of a(nother) child if the measures they considered desirable were introduced. From 25.9% of the respondents in Austria to some 75.6% in Estonia¹⁵ declared that they would probably decide to have a(nother) child. Since the percentages are quite high in many countries – not to mention the upper extremes – we argue that people tend to easily give an affirmative answer to hypothetical questions regarding their fertility intentions.¹⁶

¹⁴ The percentages are lower in Italy because only one kind of impact could be selected.

¹⁵ See note 14.

¹⁶ We additionally support this by the fact that in Estonia, 73.6% of the respondents (who had non-missing values for all four statements) agreed with all offered statements, 57.7% in Lithuania, and from 36.9% to 40.5% in Finland, Poland and Slovenia.

The answer regarding intention to have a(nother) child in the future was given (also) taking into account family policy measures existent at the time of the survey. Accordingly, all positive answers to the statements regarding consequences of introduction of the desirable family policy measures were taken into account as the cases where there probably would be an impact in the form of unplanned births. However, one may argue that the negative answer to the question »Do you intend to have a(nother) child in the future?« - with the answer »don't know, uncertain« also being available - implies that no policy measure would make people change their minds. It is also true that some respondents previously stated some serious reasons as (very) important for their not wanting a(nother) child. Due to that we checked for possible inconsistencies in answers.

The shares of those respondents who first declared not to intend to have a(nother) child in the future¹⁷ because they already had all the children they wanted, but later agreed with the statement that they would reconsider the possibility of a(nother) child as the consequences of the implementation of the family policy measures they considered desirable, is in the range from 18.8% in Austria to 75.1% in Estonia. High shares (over 30% in eight out of fourteen countries) also agreed with the most serious/obliging statement, i.e. that they would probably decide to have a(nother) child due to the implementation of the family policy measures they considered desirable. It was most surprising to find high percentages also among those respondents who previously stated that they did not intend to have a(nother) child in the future because they already had all the children they wanted, or due to serious impediments, like: their state of health did not allow it, they/their partner was too old (both may be considered permanent objective impediments), their partner did not want a(nother) child (a relatively important but not permanent impediment), etc. For instance, in Estonia, out of those who would probably decide to have a(nother) child, 86.3% previously stated not to intend to have a(nother) child because they already had all the children they wanted, their state of health did not allow having a(nother) child to 96.3% respondents, they/their partner was too old in 73.8% of cases, and in 78.9% of cases the partner did not want a(nother) child. Obviously, the respondents were very inconsistent in their answers; even more so, since their reasons for not wanting a(nother) child have nothing to do with the measures they most desired to be introduced by the government.

Out of those respondents who would probably decide to have a(nother) child if their most desired measures were implemented by the government, from 10.5% in West Germany to 41.7% in Slovenia selected improved parental leave as one of desirable measures to be implemented by their government, while from 5.6% in Austria up to 66.7% in Italy selected substantial rise in child allowance (Table 6). On average, percentages are higher for the latter measure, but this is not enough to conclude that this measure would have a higher fertility impact than the former one; in most cases, each of these measures is accompanied by another one or two desirable measures that may be more important for the respondents.

It is much less probable that both improved parental leave and substantial rise in child allowance were selected as most preferred (desirable) family policy measures.¹⁸ The highest share of such cases among respondents who would probably decide to have a(nother) child was registered in Estonia (20.6%). From the results presented in Table 6 it is evident that both of the observed measures are particularly important for respondents in Romania and Slovenia

¹⁷ We included here the respondents who gave negative answers to the question if they intended to have a(nother) child in the future, those who did not know the answer or were uncertain, and those who/whose partners were pregnant and did not state the number of additional child(ren) they may have intended to have.

¹⁸ See note 14.

as well. Estonia also has the highest percentages of respondents who prefer each of the two measures (the implementation of improved parental leave and substantial rise in child allowance) among those who would probably decide to have a(nother) child. This is even more or similarly true for countries like the Czech Republic, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Finland and Poland; however, in these countries not both measures are of high importance for respondents, thus resulting in relatively small cross sections.

Table 6: Selection of improved parental leave and a substantial rise in child allowance among desirable measures to be implemented by the government (% of respondents)

Country	Respondents who included ... among desirable measures to be implemented by the government (% of all respondents who agreed that they would probably decide to have (a)nother child if their desired measures were implemented by the government)		
	... improved parental leave a substantial rise in child allowance improved parental leave and a substantial rise in child allowance ...
Austria	24.0	5.6	0.7
Belgium (Flanders)	18.4	10.0	0.8
Czech Republic	29.9	40.3	6.5
Cyprus	29.6	12.0	2.7
Estonia	40.0	55.8	20.6
Finland	16.9	45.5	3.8
East-Germany	11.8	42.4	4.1
West-Germany	10.5	36.8	2.0
Hungary	14.9	52.5	5.5
Italy	n.a.	66.7	n.a.
Lithuania	21.6	33.1	3.0
Netherlands	19.3	41.7	3.8
Poland	24.4	24.5	2.4
Romania	32.8	44.2	11.1
Slovenia	41.7	33.4	8.3

Source: IPPAS database, May 2005 version; own calculations.

We can be quite confident that a probable decision to have a(nother) child would be a consequence of improved parental leave and substantial rise in child allowance in all cases where both measures were selected as desirable.¹⁹ It is evident from Table 7 that – out of those respondents for whom both observed measures are desirable – relatively very high shares in Estonia (85.2%), Romania (79.7%), Lithuania (71.4%), Cyprus (68.4%) and East Germany (60.9%) also agreed that they would probably decide to have a(nother) child. The shares are considerable in Finland, Czech Republic, Slovenia and Poland, too. From this we can conclude that the improvement in these two measures may be a very important incentive for people in most observed countries to decide to have a(nother) child.

¹⁹ Many respondents selected only two measures. Even if the respondents selected three measures, the two observed measures taken together may still be expected to have a higher impact than the third one.

Table 7: Probable decision to have a(nother) child as a consequence of implementation of desirable measures (%)

Country	Respondents who agreed that they would probably decide to have (a)nother child (% of all respondents who included ... among the most preferred measures to be implemented by the government)		
	... improved parental leave substantial rise in child allowance improved parental leave and substantial rise in child allowance ...
Austria	34.0	14.2	27.1
Belgium (Flanders)	35.5	18.1	25.0
Czech Republic	64.8	49.3	54.5
Cyprus	48.3	51.8	68.4
Estonia	79.8	77.3	85.2
Finland	64.9	73.2	59.1
East-Germany	50.6	45.3	60.9
West-Germany	45.1	51.4	35.0
Hungary	33.4	27.2	38.7
Italy	n.a.	5.3	n.a.
Lithuania	73.2	63.0	71.4
Netherlands	26.9	34.8	20.1
Poland	56.5	55.6	43.3
Romania	71.7	74.1	79.7
Slovenia	54.0	56.6	48.3

Source: IPPAS database, May 2005 version; own calculations.

The results of two logistic regressions are presented in Table 8. Those for Model 1 show an increasing positive effect of policy measures on probable decision to have a(nother) child up to the age group 30-34 years; from this age group on, the likelihood that a(nother) child will be born decreases and is significantly lower than for the reference group 20-24 years. The sex of respondent does not appear to be relevant.

As expected, the impact of policy measures on the probable decision to have a(nother) child is lower for the respondents living apart together and those who have no partner at all, as compared to respondents living with spouse/partner. It should be noted that – due to possible misunderstanding of the term – the group “living apart together” might include also less serious partnerships, which explains why they would react in a very similar way as respondents without a partner.

Generally, the likelihood for the respondents to probably decide to have a(nother) child if their most desirable measures were implemented is the highest for those who already have one child, which was also expected. For those who already have two children the likelihood of such decision is not statistically different from those who have no children. However, the implementation of desired measures would have a smaller effect on the fertility decision-making by those who already have three or more children than by those with no children. The explanation may be found in the fact that they already have the number of children they want.

It is also in line with our expectations that the implementation of desired family policy measures would have smaller influence on deciding to have a(nother) child by those who declared that they did not intend to have a(nother) child in the future than for those who expressed the intention to have it.

The likelihood that implementation of desired measures would stimulate the respondents to probably decide to have a(nother) child is not statistically different for those with attained higher secondary education and those with only primary or lower secondary education. But the implementation of measures would have smaller fertility impact on those with post-secondary education as compared to those with below higher secondary education. More educated are usually better off, which makes them less dependent on public transfers. They can also afford to pay for good quality childcare services.

And finally, the results show that the probably for the respondents to decide to have a(nother) child if their most desirable measures are implemented is considerably higher in Estonia and Lithuania than in Slovenia. On the other hand, this likelihood is much lower in Belgium (Flanders), the Netherlands, Hungary, Austria, and particularly in Italy.

It is interesting that our results are very much in line with those obtained by Kocourková (2001), although her analysis used the Family and Fertility Survey data and was limited to Czech respondents.

Since this paper is focused on two family policy measures, improved parental leave arrangements for working women and a substantial rise in child allowance, we compare in Model 1 the group of respondents who chose these two measures as most desirable (i.e. among their first three or two preferences) with other respondents. We wanted to find out if the implementation of their desirable measures (mostly in combination with some third measure) would have greater or smaller influence on additional fertility for this group of respondents than for all other. Since the significance is 0.108 (i.e. on the very margin of 0.1 significance), we can either state that there is no statistically significant difference or accept this significance level and say that likelihood that respondents in the selected group would decide to have a(nother) child (if their most desirable measures were implemented) is smaller than for all other respondents.

We wanted to get a better insight into the selected group of respondents and their decision-making regarding having a(nother) child in the case of their desirable family policy measures being implemented. Consequently, we ran a separate logistic regression only on this group of respondents (Model 2). Presuming a different behaviour pattern of this relatively narrow group of respondents, we expected interesting comparison of the results of Model 2 and Model 1. However, the analysis proved the number of observations (427) to be too small to obtain statistically significant results and draw strong conclusions.

We will nevertheless briefly comment on obtained statistically significant results. Model 2 suggests – like Model 1 does – that the likelihood that the implementation of desirable measures will have a positive influence on the respondents' fertility decreases with age (more rapidly than in Model 1). This may be mostly due to the fact that parental leave arrangement is important immediately after childbirth and in a limited time period, while the majority of other family policy measures remain important in a longer period or are focused on older children – meaning that they are desirable for older parents, too.

In Model 2, a positive influence of the introduction of the two observed measures on the fertility behaviour of respondents with one child, as compared to the reference group (respondents with no children), is higher than in Model 1. Also for the respondents with 2 children, the likelihood of positive influence on the decision to have a(nother) child is higher than for the respondents with no children - however, only at significant level 0.1.

Table 8: Determinants of fertility response on the introduction of most desired measures

		Model 1	Model 2		
Sex	Male	1.00	1.00		
	Female	1.02	0.64		
Age group	20-24	1.00	1.00		
	25-29	1.12	0.99		
	30-34	1.21 **	0.53		
	35-39	0.73 ***	0.12	***	
	40-44	0.58 ***	0.29	*	
	45-49	0.49 ***	0.12	***	
Living arrangement	Living with spouse/partner	1.00	1.00		
	Living apart together	0.80 ***	2.18		
	No partner	0.82 ***	0.76		
No. of children	0	1.00	1.00		
	1	1.34 ***	10.01	***	
	2	0.91	3.06	*	
	3+	0.62 ***	0.36		
Intention to have a child in the future	Yes	1.00	1.00		
	No	0.26 ***	0.42	**	
Education	Primary or Lower secondary	1.00	1.00		
	Higher secondary	0.96	1.38		
	Post-secondary	0.63 ***	0.46		
Employment status	Full-time	1.00	1.00		
	Part-time	0.98	0.41	*	
	Casual work	1.18	0.00		
	Don't have a job	0.97	0.84		
Selected measures	Those two measures (and another one)	1.00			
	Other combination of selected measures	1.24			
Country	Slovenia	1.00	1.00		
	Belgium (Flanders)	0.31 ***	0.53		
	Czech Republic	0.83	1.46		
	East-Germany	0.70 *	3.42		
	West-Germany	0.79	1.05		
	Estonia	3.22 ***	12.67	**	
	Italy	0.01 ***			
	Lithuania	2.10 ***	3.43		
	Hungary	0.25 ***	0.36		
	Netherlands	0.31 ***	0.44		
	Austria	0.25 ***	1.20		
	Poland	1.05	1.01		
	Finland	1.50 *	1.82		
-2 Log Likelihood		11358	287		

Note: Regression coefficients are expressed in odds. The reference category for each variable has odds of 1.00.

* significant at the 0.1 level

** significant at the 0.05 level

*** significant at the 0.01 level

Source: IPPAS database, May 2005 version; own calculations.

6 CONCLUSION

Our results show that people in all observed countries are strongly in favour of family policy measures including improved parental leave arrangements for working women and higher child allowance. They also tend to estimate a relatively high impact of the introduction of family policy measures they consider most desirable on their probable decision to have a(nother) child. However, logical control proved that respondents were not always consistent in their answers. This fact should be seriously taken into account, particularly in the analyses that try to quantify the possible impact in terms of probable increase in the number of births.

The literature generally suggests that family policy measures may have some positive effect on fertility. However, so far, we do not know if it is a specific measure that influences births, or a package of measures, or the welfare state as a whole, or the favourable economic conditions, or social norms and values, or something else. To make things more complicated, both the effects of individual factors and the sign and size of their interaction should be accounted for.

It is thus not surprising that many papers on the subject contain cautionary concluding remarks. For instance, Engelhard (2004) warns that her results should not be interpreted as “true” causal effects but more as an indication on the direction and strength of the causal influence of the policy incentives on fertility intentions. This is undoubtedly the case with our results, too. Much more in-depth research using individual data should be done before we will be able to formulate policy recommendations without any reservation.

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